

XI International Eurasian Educational Research Congress

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS



XI INTERNATIONAL EURASIAN
EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CONGRESS

EJERCONGRESS 2024
CONFERENCE
PROCEEDINGS

May 21-24, 2024/ Kocaeli University - Türkiye

Editor

Distinguished Professor Şenel POYRAZLI,
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by Anı Publishing

Kızılırmak Sokak 10/A Çankaya/ Ankara - Turkiye 06680

Tel : 90 312 425 81 50 pbx

Fax : 90 312 425 81 11

www.ejercongress.org

www.ejercongress@gmail.com

e-ISBN : 978-625-97716-6-3

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Main Theme

“Designing the Future: Changing Paradigms and Transhumanism with Artificial Intelligence in Education”

Sub-Themes

- Academic freedom, autonomy, and social responsibility in education
- Artificial intelligence and educational applications
- Augmented reality applications
- Barriers to learning
- Blended learning
- Computer-assisted measurement and evaluation
- Core skill sets for students and teachers
- Design of school buildings in the future
- Designing and delivering a digital strategy
- Digital competence
- Digital parenting
- Distance Education
- Earthquake Education
- Post Earthquake Trauma Training
- Earthquake and Effective Psychosocial Intervention Methods
- Earthquake and Trauma
- The Impact of Earthquakes on School Staff
- Education and society
- Education for healthy living and healthy communities
- Education for a sustainable life
- Education in the digital age: Primary, secondary, high school, higher education, and application examples
- Educational leadership in the digital age
- Effects of regional differences on education
- Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Related to Marginalized Groups
- Emergency Management at Schools
- Evidence-Based School Counseling Services for Refugees and Marginalized Groups
- Globalisation and Education
- Higher education
- Innovative learning designs for student success
- Instructional technologies in the digital age
- Integration of immigrants into education
- K-12 education (preschool, primary, and secondary education)
- Learning management systems
- Lifelong learning
- Machine learning
- Management information system
- Managing schools
- Measurement and evaluation of students’ learning outcomes
- Metaverse
- Migration and education
- Multicultural Classroom Concerns of Educators and Parents
- New educational system after COVID-19
- New skills to live and work in new times
- New technologies in teaching and learning

- New trends in educational research
- New trends in learning and teaching methods
- New trends in research methods
- Pedagogy, educational programs, and teaching
- Politics, good governance, and leadership in the educational sector
- Program design and development
- Promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion
- Psychological counseling and guidance in education
- Quality assurance/standards and accreditation
- Research and innovations in education
- Research ethics
- Right to an education
- Sustainable Educational Goals Related to Refugees
- Teacher education in the digital age
- The Possibility of Fundamental Changes in the Curriculum
- The role of parents in education
- The skills we need to thrive in a post-COVID-19 world
- Vocational education
- Ways to overcome the digital divide

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Exploring Facilitators and Barriers of Culturally Responsive Teaching in Early Childhood Classrooms: A Qualitative Meta-Synthesis

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Abstract

Multiculturalism, driven by increasing global mobility, is reflected in early childhood classrooms. During these formative years, implementing a culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) that meets the needs of all children in multicultural classrooms is crucial for their development in all areas. However, challenges in culturally responsive practices persist. To address these issues, it is essential to gain a holistic perspective on the barriers and facilitators of CRP. It is undeniable that early childhood teachers who are the primary subjects of multicultural classrooms directly experience these barriers and facilitators. With the purpose of enlightening barriers and facilitators of CRP, 32 qualitative studies that collected data from early childhood teachers in multicultural classrooms were investigated in the scope of this meta-synthesis study. The findings revealed that addressing diverse children's needs, creating opportunities to learn about diverse cultures, implementing culturally relevant classroom activities, teachers' knowledge and sensitivity toward children's culture, and parent partnerships are prominent facilitators of CRP. On the other hand, teachers' inadequacy in handling cultural diversity, communication issues between children, teachers, and parents, and contradiction of the host country's values with diverse cultures are significant barriers to CRP. Conclusions and recommendations for teacher educators and researchers addressing these findings are presented in the current study.

[This paper was published in: "EJER Congress 2024 International Eurasian Educational Research Congress Conference Proceedings," Ani Publishing, 2024, pp. 54-60]

Keywords: Culturally Responsive Teaching, Inclusive Pedagogy, Early Childhood Education, In-Service Teachers

Introduction

The early childhood years play a crucial role in human life as it lays the foundations for a healthy and strong physical, cognitive, and social development, as well as fostering lifelong learning and overall well-being (UNICEF, 2017). However, many children from diverse backgrounds suffer from a lack of proper early childhood education and care (ECEC) services that address their needs (OECD, 2023; UNICEF, 2017). Since cultural diversity is increasing due to immigration all around the world, education requires adaptation to the new structure that is inevitably reflected in the classrooms (OECD, 2018). Regardless of their cultural backgrounds, all children need to benefit from high-quality ECEC that is tailored to their unique needs (Aboud & Yousafzai, 2016; OECD, 2023). To provide this, multicultural education proposes a school system that considers social justice and inclusivity helping children to develop cultural sensitivity and respect for the uniqueness of individuals while providing a high-quality learning environment for all (Nikawanti, 2016). As an integral part of multicultural education, culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) provides a meaningful engagement between children, teachers, and the curriculum while fostering appreciation for all cultural identities and critical reflection on situations causing inequalities in the school environment (Saint-Hilaire, 2014). CRP advocates that children learn best when they have a sense of belonging within their learning community and

when educational methods and learning environments are tailored to their cultural backgrounds (Rychly & Graves, 2012). As the primary facilitators of a culturally responsive learning environment, early childhood teachers play a pivotal role in creating such an inclusive atmosphere (Durden et al., 2015). According to Chen et al. (2009), the ability to practice CRP relies on early childhood teachers' deep understanding of their own culture, and other cultures, as well as the perspectives and possible biases towards diverse cultures. Similarly, Durden et al. (2015) suggest that teachers should ask questions to themselves such as "What are my beliefs about X culture?" or "What stereotypes do I hold about X community?". Also, teachers need to require the abilities to build upon children's knowledge of their own culture and prior experiences (Chen et al., 2009). According to Gunn et al. (2021) selecting educational materials relevant to children's cultural backgrounds helps them to be more engaged in learning.

Despite the increasing number of early childhood teachers receiving education and having awareness of CRP and diversifying their educational practices to address the cultural background of children in their classrooms, various challenges still exist in practice (Durden et al., 2015; OECD, 2023). Some of the challenges revealed in the literature are related to parent-teacher partnerships (Norheim & Moser, 2020), lack of

instructional sources and stakeholder support (Phoon et al., 2013), and lack of understanding of the unique cultural characteristics of the related community (Firstater et al., 2015). In order to maximize the benefits offered by CRP, it is essential to gain a deeper understanding of the facilitators and barriers to early childhood teachers' implementation in ECEC settings. The current study aims to synthesize qualitative studies to reveal the facilitators and barriers remarked by early childhood teachers teaching children from diverse cultures in their classrooms. Given that all classrooms are culturally unique, culturally responsive teaching is far from being simple, one-dimensional, and stable over time (Gunn et al., 2021). For this reason, conducting a systematic meta-synthesis is considered to be important to unveil findings interrelatedly to give a holistic perspective on the area. To align with the current study's objectives, this research sought answers to the following research questions:

What facilitators do early childhood teachers experience when implementing CRP in culturally diverse early childhood classrooms, based on evidence from qualitative studies?
 What barriers do early childhood teachers experience when implementing CRP in culturally diverse early childhood classrooms, based on evidence from qualitative studies?

Method

The present study was designed as a qualitative meta-synthesis. Qualitative meta synthesis is a qualitative method that is used for analyzing, synthesizing, and interpreting findings of qualitative research to discover meaning in it by congregating the body of knowledge on a subject matter (Major & Savin-Baden, 2010). Since the present study aims at gaining a holistic and deeper understanding of facilitators and barriers in early childhood teachers' implementation of CRP in culturally diverse early childhood classrooms, a qualitative meta synthesis design is considered the best way to actualize this aim.

Different combinations of the following terminologies were used to search in two significant databases as Scopus and Web of Science: multicultural, culturally diverse, culturally responsive, early childhood teacher, and preschool teacher. Inclusion and exclusion criteria that was used are:

Inclusion Criteria

Accessible peer-reviewed articles from significant databases, Qualitative studies including a sample of early childhood teachers who teach in a culturally diverse classroom, All studies conducted at different times were included in the data set.

Exclusion Criteria

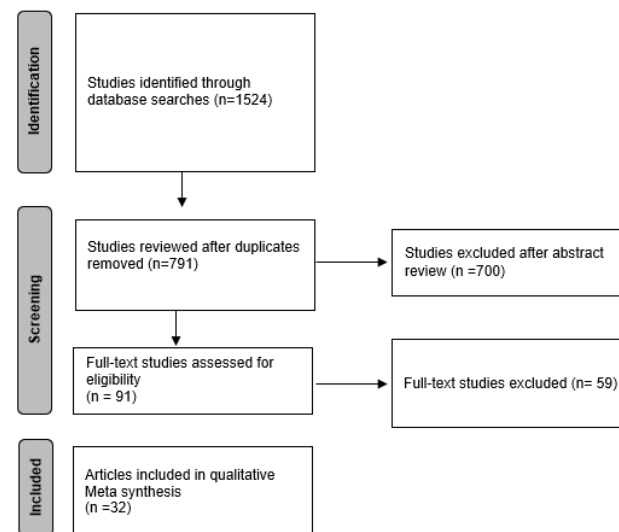
Studies using no qualitative methodology,
 Studies which do not include qualitative data from early childhood teachers,
 Studies collected data from teachers of children with other diverse needs than cultural diversity such as teachers of children with special education needs.

Data Collection Process

Following the aforementioned terminologies were searched in certain databases (Scopus, Web of Science) researchers achieved 1524 articles and the number decreased to 791 after duplicates were removed. Then, researchers reviewed abstracts of each of the articles, and 700 articles were excluded as a result of this process. 91 studies were recognized as eligible to be included in the full-text review. After 59 studies were excluded as a result of the full-text review, 32 studies were included for the meta-synthesis.

Figure 1

PRISMA Diagram of Data Collection Process



Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using the three main steps for data analysis in qualitative meta-synthesis studies as outlined by Major & Savin-Baden (2010): summarizing the findings from various studies and determining which findings are well-defined and supported by evidence; comparing and combining these findings; and interpreting the results about the main themes that emerge across the included studies. The analysis was conducted using the MAXQDA 2020 software program.

Findings

The study findings are presented under two main themes: "Facilitators" and "Barriers". The categories and codes are shown in the tables below. The findings are detailed and supported with quotations from the articles.

Table 1*Facilitators*

Categories	Codes
Facilitators of a culturally responsive learning environment	Creating opportunities to learn about diverse cultures (n=7)
	Addressing children's needs and interests (n=6)
	Parent engagement (n=5)
	Curriculum (n=2)
	Community engagement (n=1)
Facilitators of a linguistically responsive learning environment	Providing visual and audio support (n=4)
	Non-verbal communication (n=4)
	Evoking positive emotions toward language diversity in the classroom (n=4)
	Bilingual teachers (n=2)
	Use of digital translation tools (n=2)
	Teacher's conversations with children to support second language (n=1)
	Peer-to-peer talk (n=1)
Facilitators of culturally and linguistically responsive activities	Relatable with children's life (n=7)
	Parent involvement (n=5)
	Storytelling (n=2)
	Culture-based art activities (n=2)
	Use of children's literature (n=2)
	Use of teachable moments (n=2)
Teachers' characteristics that facilitate a culturally responsive learning environment	Technology use (n=1)
	Teacher's knowledge of children's culture (n=9)
	Teacher's sensitivity towards other cultures (n=7)
	Experience (n=7)
	Teacher's diverse background (n=3)
	High expectations (n=3)
	Professional development (n=2)
	Teacher's enthusiasm (n=2)

The codes related to facilitators of a culturally responsive learning environment are shown in Table 1. Teachers mentioned that they create opportunities to learn about diverse cultures in the classroom to support children's social development and help them learn about themselves and others. For example, children learn the names of fruits in other languages (Stier et al., 2012), songs in different cultures (Hurley et al., 2011), and talk about counties their friends come from (Çağlayan & Başal, 2023). Teachers incorporate children's needs and interests to create a culturally responsive learning environment by adjusting their instructions (Lam, 2023; Ng et al., 2022), considering cultural aspects (Guo, 2015), and connecting children's ideas to their programs (Sturdivant & Alanís, 2019). In addition to incorporating children's needs and interests, parent engagement helps in understanding the parenting practices of diverse families and informs families about the school's policies and activities related to the education of diverse children (Lin & Bates, 2010; Mevorach, 2008). Participants also highlighted the importance of a preschool curriculum that allows for culturally sensitive practices (Chen, 2023; Durden et al., 2015). Moreover, teachers in Durden et al.'s (2015) study stated that partnerships with minority culture institutions can support culturally responsive learning environments.

The codes under the theme of facilitators of a linguistically responsive learning environment are also given in Table 1. To stimulate children's language learning, teachers provide songs, daily schedules, basic words in various languages, and pictures on the walls (Çağlayan & Başal, 2023; Durden et al., 2015; Schwartz et al., 2023). Teachers use non-verbal communication such as gestures, body language, and eye contact to overcome language barriers (Çağlayan & Başal, 2023; Hurley et al., 2011; Smith, 2020). Furthermore, they encourage children to speak their mother tongues to build their confidence and sense of belonging. As well as, since children feel more confident and welcomed when their mother tongues are accepted and included in the learning environment, they try to evoke positive emotions towards the various languages in the classroom. Teachers support children in speaking in front of their peers in their mother tongue even if others do not understand, and they support children's learning of basic words in diverse languages (Çağlayan & Başal, 2023; Kurian, 2024; Schwartz et al., 2023). Another facilitator, the existence of bilingual teachers in schools is helpful for building trust in diverse children (Smith, 2020; Chen, 2023). In addition, the use of digital tools for translation is helpful for teachers with language barriers in communication with children and parents (Ng et al., 2022, Smith, 2020). Conversations with children learning a second language is stated as important (Kultti & Pramling, 2021).

The codes under the culturally and linguistically responsive activities category are shown in Table 1. The majority of the participants stated that activities, materials, instruction techniques, assessment strategies (Brown & Lee, 2012) and examples (Amani & Mgaiwa, 2023; Mgaiwa & Amani, 2023) should be relevant to the children's culture and daily environment to be meaningful. Parent involvement practices are also mentioned as a facilitator of culturally responsive

activities (Durden et al., 2015; Hurley et al., 2011; Sturdivant & Alanís, 2019). For example, a teacher in the study of Sturdivant and Alanís (2019) invited family members who can play a musical instrument to play nursery rhymes from their culture. Also, teachers use culturally relevant stories to support children's academic and social development and soothe children (Amani & Mgaiwa, 2023; Kurian, 2023). Similarly, children's literature is mentioned as an effective tool to enhance culturally responsive activities (Ragnarsdóttir et al., 2023; Sturdivant & Alanís, 2019). In some studies, teachers stated that they are trying to catch teachable moments to increase children's awareness about diversity and equity issues (Lang et al., 2024; Stier et al., 2012). Additionally, to make teaching more culturally responsive, teachers benefit from technology. For example, they show educational videos to make teaching more relevant to children's own lives, and visuals to explain some concepts (Kale et al., 2023).

Teachers' characteristics that facilitate a culturally responsive learning environment are also given as a category of facilitators theme in Table 1. Teacher's knowledge of children's culture emerged as a significant facilitator of CRP. Understanding the living conditions, traditions, and perspectives of diverse families aids teachers in communication as well as addressing academic and social-emotional needs (Amani & Mgaiwa, 2023). Another facilitator is teachers' sensitivity towards other cultures (Brown & Lee, 2012; Kess & Puroila, 2023; Kurian, 2023; Mevorach, 2008). Participants believe that teachers need to have a positive attitude towards diverse cultures and try to understand their needs through non-judgmental communication (Kess & Puroila, 2023). Teachers' experience is another important facilitator, as they improve their skills in managing multicultural classrooms over time (Durden et al., 2015), master the curriculum, and receive the support systems they need (Brown & Lee, 2012). Moreover, teachers' diverse backgrounds are beneficial as they can bridge the gap between children and families from similar backgrounds (Adair et al., 2012), show empathy towards diverse backgrounds (Schwartz et al., 2023), and serve as role models for children (Lang et al., 2024). Similarly, teachers' professional development (Brown & Lee, 2012) and enthusiasm (Durden et al., 2015) for educating diverse children are revealed as facilitators of CRP. High expectations for diverse children are also identified as a facilitator, since teachers use more academic language and ask higher order questions (Sturdivant & Alanís, 2019).

Table 2

Barriers

Categories	Codes
Teacher-related barriers	Teachers' inadequacy in handling cultural diversity (n=7) Teachers' lack of knowledge about children's culture (n=7) Teacher's ignorance of cultural differences (n=5) Teachers' narrow perspective towards CRP (n=4)

Language-related barriers	Teachers' idea of cultural deficit (n=4) Teachers' hesitation about offending the child (n=3) Teachers' low expectations (n=2) Teachers' negative attitude (n=2) Communication issues with parents and children (n=7) Lack of parental support for children's learning either the second language and their local language (n=5) Prioritizing the teaching of the host country's language (n=3) Teachers' discomfort with unfamiliar languages (n=1) Teachers' lack of education on multilingual pedagogy (n=1) Lack of language education policy in preschools (n=1)
	Family-related barriers
	Heavy working conditions of parents (n=2) The conditions of the settlements of the families (n=2) Lack of awareness on education (n=1) Parental resistance to multicultural activities (n=1)
	Culture-related barriers
	Contradiction of host country's values with diverse cultures (n=5)
	School-related barriers
	Large number of children (n=1)

The codes under the category of teacher-related barriers are presented in Table 2. In many of the articles, teachers' inadequacy in handling cultural diversity is presented as a barrier to CRP. Some participants revealed that they struggle to answer children's questions about the religious practices of peers from diverse cultures, such as eating halal food (Stier et al., 2012) and incorporating diverse cultures into their curriculum (Ng et al., 2021). Additionally, teachers' lack of knowledge about children's culture causes problems in both their instructions and relationships with children and families. Teachers' narrow perspectives towards CRP are revealed as another barrier. Examples include the idea of implementing CRP only if there is a large number of diverse children in the classroom (Ng et al., 2022), superficial talks about cultural practices without emphasizing the child's home culture (Schwartz et al, 2023), and only hanging pictures and singing songs reflecting cultures (Kale et al., 2023). Teachers' hesitation about offending the child due to insufficient knowledge about the child's culture, even if well-intentioned, is also highlighted (Lang et al., 2024; Hurley et al., 2011; Sanagavarapu & Wong, 2008). Some teachers believe that diverse children struggle academically and socially due to intellectual incapacities rather than their need for CRP, revealing a cultural deficit as a barrier (Lew & Choi, 2020; Mevorach, 2008). Teachers who do not believe that children

from diverse backgrounds can succeed set low expectations for them (Ng et al., 2022; Kale et al., 2023). Additionally, some teachers have negative attitudes toward diverse children and their families, which is an additional barrier (Ng et al., 2022; Schwartz et al., 2023).

The codes under the category of language-related barriers are also presented in Table 2. In diverse preschools, communication issues arise between teachers, parents, and children due to unfamiliarity with each other's language (Mgaiwa, & Amani, 2023; Smith, 2020). Parental preferences for focusing only on the host country's language to ensure future social and academic success (Lew & Choi, 2020) and their lack of support in teaching the second language due to unfamiliarity are revealed as barriers to a multilingual learning environment (Ng et al., 2022). Similarly, teachers sometimes prioritize teaching the host country's language due to academic concerns (Kurian, 2024; Ragnarsdóttir et al., 2023). Additionally, teacher's discomfort with unfamiliar languages (Lew & Choi, 2020), lack of education on multilingual pedagogy, and a lack of language education policy in preschools (Schwartz et al., 2023) are barriers to creating a multilingual learning environment.

The codes under the category of family-related barriers are given in Table 2. Some studies revealed that parents cannot participate in parent involvement activities due to heavy work conditions (Schwartz et al., 2023; Smith, 2020), long distances from schools and crime issues in their districts (Kale et al., 2023), lack of awareness about education (Mevorach, 2008), and resistance to multicultural activities (Stier & Sandström, 2018).

Under the category of culture-related barriers, the code-named as contradictions between the host country's values and diverse cultures are presented in Table 2. According to numerous articles, some ideas or parents' practices conflict with the values or rules of the host country. In addition, large class sizes emerged as a school-related barrier to CRP (Mgaiwa and Amani, 2023).

Discussion

Based on the study results, the main facilitators of CRP encompass understanding children's culture and language, addressing children's needs, and finding ways to integrate their culture into the classroom. These findings align with previous research underscoring teachers' positive attitudes towards diversity and efforts to implement CRP (Chen et al., 2009; Gunn et al., 2021). In addition, parent engagement emerged as a prominent facilitator of CRP, as evidenced by our findings. Sturdivant and Alanís (2019) similarly emphasized the importance of family engagement in creating a multicultural community by incorporating families into the curriculum and bringing elements of children's homes into the classroom. Another notable facilitator is the teachers' diverse backgrounds. McDevitt (2021) revealed that teachers with immigrant backgrounds contribute to creating multilingual learning environments and a better

understanding of the experiences and needs of immigrant children.

When examining the barriers to CRP, findings indicate that they revolve around the teacher's attitudes and inadequacies in implementing CRP, the stakeholders' unfamiliarity with each other's language, families' living conditions and attitudes towards education, school and cultural-based barriers. The OECD (2019) report underscores the scarcity of pre- and in-service teacher education on CRP. Our findings related to teachers' inadequacy in handling cultural diversity, ignorance of cultural differences, and narrow perspectives on CRP can be attributed to the lack of quality education on CRP. Language-related barriers identified in this study, such as unfamiliarity with each other's language in schools and prioritizing the host country's language, align with the study of Du Plessis and Louw (2008). In contrast, Nemeth (2016) proposes that incorporating children's home language into their learning environment enhances their academic and social development as well as helps raise them as bilingual individuals. In addition, contradictions between the host country's values and diverse cultures are seen as significant barriers causing dilemmas in ECEC centers. Various studies have documented dilemmas stemming from cultural contradictions in gender, daily routines, celebrations, language, and punctuality issues (Olsson, 2023; Puskás et al., 2017).

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that, from the perspective of many early childhood teachers, understanding and addressing children's cultures and forming sensitive partnerships with parents are significant facilitators of CRP. Conversely, barriers to CRP include teachers' lack of pedagogical knowledge, instructional abilities, sensitivity towards diverse cultures, insufficient parent engagement, and culture and language related dilemmas. Since these results coincide with many other studies in the literature, this study provides a comprehensive perspective on the facilitators and barriers of CRP.

Recommendations

The findings are expected to inform teacher educators about barriers faced by future early childhood teachers, guiding efforts to empower candidates by including compulsory CRP modules in the teacher education curriculum. Given that teachers' sensitivity to children's cultures is a key facilitator, incorporating issues of social equality and justice into these modules is anticipated to have a positive impact. Further research on the characteristics of quality teacher education for CRP can guide the development of these modules. Additionally, the findings are expected to prompt policymakers to address and mitigate barriers faced by early childhood teachers by enhancing facilitators of CRP. This includes culturally and linguistically responsive practices in the early childhood curriculum to guide early childhood education teachers and alleviate the dilemmas they experience. Lastly, schools should provide resources and

support systems to facilitate CRP, including culturally relevant materials and family engagement programs.

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